

2013 Letters About Literature Level 2 Honorable Mention

Hannah Shoemaker's letter to Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*

November 28, 2013

Dear Mrs. Lowry,

Finding our place in the world isn't always as easy as people make it out to be. Throughout many of my years, everyone else seemed to know how they wanted their life to turn out. But not me. In Kindergarten, when the teacher would ask, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" the hopes and dreams of all the other kids seemed so real, while I would always reply, "Somebody." That's all I wanted to be; this aching, yearning desire to make a difference in the world. Not necessarily famous, but happy – someone who people would say for generations to come, "I remember that girl" My situation – now, when I look back – much reminds me of a quote by John Lennon that speaks to me, giving me a bit of joy and explaining just how much happiness is worth. He once said, "When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down 'happy.' They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life." Most of all, I wanted to be memorable. Sure, I had other dreams, but they didn't seem as grand or fine as everyone else's, and they definitely lacked that special finesse that I knew I had inside of me. I had – and still have – potential. My problem was that I didn't know how to access it.

Your book, *The Giver*, cut deeply into me. "What a delight," I thought, at first, on the subject of having others make decisions for me. How fantastic – how absolutely superb – would it be to not have the pressure to choose; no more dawdling in lines or faltering in step. Decision making was what I lacked the most. The words never seemed to make it to my lips when I needed them most, and I would stand, frozen in a moment of panic, seemingly oblivious to the world around me. However, after continuing to read, I soon learned that maybe the act of decision making was a greater treasure to behold. Long ago – centuries ago – not everyone was free. Decisions weren't an option. The beauty and glory of life – the strong, passionate

moments – were completely sucked away by the shackles of segregation and slavery that embedded themselves deep into the heart of our nation. And before that, the war that started our great country, and seemingly rattled it to its core. The war for our freedom, and for the freedom of the people to come. Quite soon, I learned along with Jonas, that the freedom to choose and to speak without prosecution is more than just a simple want. It is a basic need; something that helps to define us as the people we are today. Rights such as itself are more often than not unappreciated.

I grew along with Jonas. For hours – days, even – I couldn't set down *The Giver*. I felt as if I *was* Jonas. His thoughts melded into mine, and suddenly the world seemed entirely different. For hour, upon hour, I read. I fell into the world of the book. And for the time being, all my worries disappeared. For the past year, I had worried about how much I weighed, the way I looked in the morning, and if being me was affecting my “popularity.” After reading *the Giver*, something changed. In Jonas' world, everything was the same. Everyone acted the same. There was no “being you.” Your whole life was constricted and constrained by nonsense laws. I think that that was when I decided I no longer cared. Jonas fought for the option of being himself; I ran from it. I made myself promise to always be myself, and I am proud to say that I kept that vow.

Jonas' tale taught me so much more, though. Maybe even things you wouldn't think to be “teachable.” I learned to appreciate everything – all the color and all the moments that I would once have taken for granted. Now, I think ahead. I need to keep a positive attitude. One day, I'll be old and weary. Not anytime soon, but it still will happen. And one day, I won't be able to go to school, or fall in love, or go to sleepovers, or perform in musicals, or jump in leaf piles, or laugh until my face turns red. In those days, everything now will seem foreign and distant, just as those days far in the future feel now. I don't want to look back knowing that I wasn't myself. I want to look back and be able to see that I made life worthwhile.

Thank you, Mrs. Lowry. Thank you for teaching me. Thank you for speaking to my soul. Thank you for inspiring me.

Your Reader,
Hannah Shoemaker

